


Unlocking Opportunity for Women in Business

Justina Balankena is a small-business owner in Bomani, Tanzania, where she sells  lightbulbs, electrical tape and paintbrushes, as well as small, single-unit solar lights and energy-efficient cookstoves. (Courtesy of USAID)

As the YALI Network kicks off [#Africa4Her](#), we're looking at some of the biggest issues facing women in sub-Saharan Africa today. And the issues that hold back women — 50 percent of the population — hold back the countries they live in.

Nowhere is this so clear as in the economic sector. When it comes to fueling economic growth, studies have repeatedly shown that giving women economic opportunity is among the most powerful fuels that exist.

A report by global investment and banking firm Goldman Sachs found that bringing more women into the labor force has the potential to boost a country's per capita income by an average of 12 percent by 2030.

The same research showed that women use their earnings to buy goods and services that improve family and community welfare, which in turn creates further economic growth.

And yet worldwide, 70 percent of businesses owned by women have no access to financial services such as savings accounts and loans. Laws and cultural traditions limit the economic contributions women are able to make, whether by not allowing them to borrow startup money in their own names, by favoring male relatives in the ownership of capital, or by demeaning their opinions in male-dominated business environments.

We'll look at women in Africa who have taken on these obstacles and made strides toward a more inclusive business culture. We'll look at ways both men and women can address gender bias and unlock the potential for economic growth that women represent.

In the upcoming YALI Network Online Course "Paving the Way for Women Entrepreneurs," entrepreneur/executive E. Diane White gives practical tips on what women can do to ensure their voices are heard in the business world.

How will you invest in women and girls? Go to yali.state.gov/pledge to make your pledge.

Ambassador Cathy Russell on #Africa4Her

Cathy Russell serves as the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues. Previously she

served at the White House, coordinating the development of the Obama Administration's strategy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence globally. Join Ambassador Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) for a Twitter #YALICHAT on Wednesday, March 2nd at 13:30 UTC. Additional details below.

U.S. Ambassador Cathy Russell Amb. 
Russell in a meeting with Wanjira Mathai, the Director, Partnerships for Women's Entrepreneurship in Renewables (wPOWER) at the 2015 Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Kenya. (State Department Photo)

The United States invests in women and girls for many of the reasons we invest in young African leaders: it's the right thing to do, and it's the smart thing to do.

When policies and programs consider women and girls, they're more successful. They promote stronger democracies and more durable peace agreements. They increase food security and make for healthier families. They improve public service delivery. And they lead to fewer conflicts and more rapidly growing economies.

As the U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, it's my job to work with my colleagues across the U.S. government and with leaders around the world to advance the status of women and girls. As President Obama [said in his trip to Kenya and Ethiopia last summer](#), countries won't get ahead unless they include and empower women and girls.

That's why every day I talk with government officials, world leaders, and women and girls about how we can work together to help women and girls achieve their full potential.

In that past year alone, we've made some exciting progress to advance the status of women and girls. Here are just three of the main areas where we're focused on making a difference.

Education

Last March, the President and First Lady announced Let Girls Learn, a U.S. government initiative that addresses a range of challenges that prevent adolescent girls from attending and completing school.

As part of Let Girls Learn, the United States supported a [Women in Science \(WiSci\) camp](#) in Rwanda last summer. For three weeks, 120 girls from nine countries learned valuable skills in science, technology, engineering, art and design, and mathematics (STEAM).

Health and safety

Education is one way to help empower women and girls. But it takes a complete approach to get the job done—one that considers issues like health and safety, in addition to education. That's why the United States is also working with Tanzania and Malawi to support women and girls from several angles.

In addition to focusing on education, our efforts will also tackle gender-based violence and health challenges like HIV/AIDS. Malawi and Tanzania are [DREAMS](#) (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe) countries, which means they are part of a partnership between the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Nike Foundation to tackle HIV/AIDS.

Entrepreneurship

Financial independence can make an incredible difference for women and their communities. Women are more likely to invest their earnings back into their family, paying for things like their kids' education and immunizations. And when they own their own business, women are more likely to hire other women, so empowering women entrepreneurs has a multiplier effect within communities.

That's why we're focused on empowering women entrepreneurs. Over the past year, the United States has opened physical centers that offer resources to women entrepreneurs in Zambia and Kenya. And just last week I joined Kiva to launch the [Women's Entrepreneurship Fund](#), which will expand access to finance for women entrepreneurs in 84 countries.

The fact is that it will take all of us – men and women, boys and girls – to achieve the progress we need to help women and girls achieve their full potential. But if every one of us takes action, we can make real and lasting progress for gender equality.

You can help make this possible. [Take the #Africa4Her pledge](#) and tell us how you will invest in women and girls. Show us how you will raise, educate, protect, support, mentor, and elevate the many women and girls of courage in your life.

[Join the YALICHAT](#) on Wednesday, March 2 at:

12:30-13:30 Cape Verde Time (CVT)

13:30-14:30 UTC/GMT


14:30-15:30 West Africa Time (WAT)

15:30-16:30 Central Africa (CAT) and South Africa Standard Time (SAST)

18:30-19:30 Eastern Africa Time (EAT)

19:30-20:30 Seychelles and Mauritius (SCT/MUT)

Women's Situation Rooms: Women Protecting Women's Voting Rights


Liberians celebrate the inauguration of 
President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.
Liberia's 2011 election was the first to use a

Women's Situation Room. (©AP Images)

While Nigerians went to the polls in March 2015 for what would prove to be [historic elections](#), 40 young people in Abuja, mostly women, answered phones around the clock, fielding calls about outbreaks of violence and voter suppression.

Meanwhile, 300 female [election monitors](#) observed polls in 10 targeted Nigerian states, reporting irregularities back to Abuja. There, a team of eight eminent women from Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal worked with political parties and religious groups to address threats of violence against women voters and women candidates as they happened.

Welcome to the Women's Situation Room. Nigeria's election was the most recent African election to benefit from a four-year-old idea that's been spreading throughout the continent. Originated during the 2011 presidential and legislative elections in Liberia to promote women's leadership development, the Women's Situation Room model has been replicated in Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mali and Guinea-Bissau.

Participants in Nigeria's Women's  Situation Room during the March 2015 elections. (Courtesy U.S. Embassy Nigeria)

Studies show that women and children are the most likely to be affected by election violence, including efforts to prevent women from exercising their right to vote. Women's Situation Rooms employ women and youth to ensure access to the polls.

Among the desks in Nigeria's Women's Situation Room was one staffed with police representatives and another with representatives from Nigeria's Independent Electoral Commission, allowing immediate response to outbreaks of violence and incidents of voter exclusion.

"If a situation happens in the field and we want answers from the police — like violence erupted in a certain state while [women] were taking part in the election — we respond by finding the particular arm of government, INEC or police, to tackle the situation. If they're in the room, it's of course easier and faster," Turrie Akerele Ismael, Nigeria's solicitor-general and one of the situation room's eminent women, reported to U.N. Women.

"Women and youth play an active role in sustaining peace before, during and after the elections," said Sylvie Ndongmo of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which coordinated the Women's Situation Room for the Nigerian election. When civic groups work with governmental agencies to reduce threats to voters and candidates, said Ndongmo, "the threat of electoral violence becomes an opportunity for promoting sustainable peace and democracy."

#Africa4Her Generates Support for Women and Girls: Olivier Nathacia, South Africa




We asked some of the many YALI Network members who in March made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge to invest in women and girls in their community how they have fulfilled that pledge. Here is Olivier Nathacia's story.

I have pledged to invest my time, knowledge and the other resources accessible to me to improve and empower the lives of women and girls within my community.

As a young woman residing in South Africa, I noticed that there is a gap regarding support of women's development and growth. Women are still sidelined, especially those residing in less privileged areas.

I also experienced the challenges that most young women and girls come across, especially in the corporate and business arenas. I realized that women are still severely hampered by discrimination, lack of resources and economic opportunities, limited access to decision-making and gender-based violence.

I volunteered because I want to be that ripple of change that will close the gap and become part of a generation that makes a difference — a generation that changes obscure obstacles within society about women and girls through entrepreneurship, public innovation and leadership.

Olivier Nathacia wants to close 
the opportunity gap for women
and girls

I have learned that service is important. More especially when you work with the community, you need to know how to serve people, communicate with them, have time for them, show them that you care. Most of all I learned what it means to be disciplined and be a people's person.

Through volunteering, I learned that leadership is not for the faint-hearted. I have learned what it means to connect and how to build a network that will transform this nation.

Most importantly, I learned that women and girls are strong leaders by nature — they thrive in every situation or circumstance. They vouch for justice, yet they need support in order to achieve whatever they want to accomplish in life. They need a platform to share their knowledge, to network and build each other up.

This experience through [#Africa4Her](#) has made me a creative leader and inspired me to continue with the journey I have embarked on.

I can now connect and communicate better. Being amongst women and girls all the time has changed my perception of how women deal and do things from different circumstances of their lives.

Service is important when you work with the community.

On August 28, 2015, we will once again host an event that focuses on young women and girls. The event will be about the importance of exercising and healthy living.

Although it is still hard for me to get all the support I need from government in order to make things happen within my community, I encourage myself to keep going because my passion is assisting young women and girls in every way possible.

More than 1,000 YALI Network members made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge. They represent 47 countries, and 54 percent of them are men. If you made an [#Africa4Her](#) pledge and would like to share your story, please email us at YALINetwork@state.gov and use the subject line “[#Africa4Her](#).”

Man Up to Stop Violence Against Women: Uganda

“Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse and cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography.”

— Man Up Campaign

James Byarugaba



While a student at Makerere University in Kampala, James Byarugaba began to learn about gender and human rights. He discovered that “the cost of gender inequality is huge” and made a commitment to raise awareness about the value of equality.

In 2010, Byarugaba learned about the [Man Up](#) campaign, a collaboration of the Clinton Global Initiative and Vital Voices Global Partnership. At the group’s youth summit in Johannesburg that year, he met other youth who shared his commitment to equality and to ending violence against women and girls. “I realized I was not fighting alone,” says the 33-year-old, who also serves as a lecturer in project planning and management at Makerere.

Byarugaba has put his commitment to work through the nonprofit group Youth Alive Uganda. He says Youth Alive has been successful at ending violence against women in communities they work in because it:

- Incorporates gender into all its programs, which include skills development and health care.
- Started peer support groups for young people. About 100 groups with 50 members each meet with parents' associations, teachers, religious leaders and men's and women's groups around the country to talk about the benefits of gender equality. "Working with community men's groups has helped reduce sexual and physical violence against women," Byarugaba says.
- Promotes gender equality and an end to gender-based violence to school officials. That has resulted in some schools adopting child protection policies, providing separate toilets for girls and boys, and, in some instances, changing rooms and sanitary pads for girls.
- Provides teen-oriented prenatal sessions where young mothers can share their experiences and challenges.
- Partners with local institutions and governmental bodies to mobilize logistical and financial support for gender equality efforts.

Members of the Man Up campaign in Uganda get the message out.



"My vision is one world ... where boys and girls and men and women have the same opportunities and are empowered to contribute equally in shaping the world they want," Byarugaba says. "My vision is of a violence-free world where no human being owns the other or inflicts harm based on one's gender."


Learn about more ways to get involved at yali.state.gov/16days and [pledge](#) today to help end Gender-Based Violence.

Man Up to Stop Violence Against Women: Burundi

"Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse and cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography."

— Man Up Campaign

Thierry Kajeneza grew up witnessing women and girls being raped, forced into prostitution and sent out alone to collect water and firewood and to look for food.

Thierry Kajeneza, front center, and a  colleague tell rural women in Burundi about their rights.

"I saw how women were not invited like men to speak out about their problems and about what they

could contribute to the construction of Burundi” after a long civil war, Kajeneza, a 35-year-old human rights activist and YALI Network member, recalls.

That impression pushed Kajeneza and a colleague to establish [ICIRORE C’AMAHORO](#) in 2007. The Ngozi province-based group advocates for human rights, especially for women and girls. It wants to help young people avoid the mistakes of previous generations and learn to become leaders.

ICIRORE C’AMAHORO, which means “mirror of peace” in Kirundi, reaches out to young women and men to help spread its messages to the wider public. It runs youth clubs in schools throughout the country and started a youth camp. It organizes gatherings that give young men and women opportunities to talk about gender issues. And it encourages women to form support networks and learn financial skills.

The organization’s strategy includes finding opportunities in the community where husbands and wives can work together to make decisions, then discuss why each decision was made. That encourages “a safe environment for women to express themselves and allows both husbands and wives to recognize the power of working together ... in the workplace, at home and in the community,” Kajeneza says.

Kajeneza notes that Burundi’s national and local governments have “responded positively” to ICIRORE’s work. Local authorities help inspire residents to attend ICIRORE’s meetings and training sessions. The national government gave ICIRORE the land on which it is constructing offices.

The international community also has responded. In 2010, the civil rights advocate was invited to the Man Up Young Leaders Summit in Johannesburg. A collaboration of the Clinton Global Initiative and Vital Voices Global Partnership, the [Man Up](#) campaign motivates youth to help stop violence against women and girls and advance gender equality.

Kajeneza follows the YALI Network on Facebook and says he likes “knowing other young people who are involved in many domains of leadership.” He advises members to use social media to share information about what they are doing to end violence against women.


“This issue of gender violence will be solved if we all stand together. ... The world will become a village where men and women will live in harmony,” Kajeneza says.

Take your pledge today for how you will help end violence against women and girls in your communities at yali.state.gov/4her.

Girl Power and Protection, Now and Forever

Even as a child in Zimbabwe, Nyaradzo Mashayamombe tried to defend and protect abused orphans.

In secondary school, she saw boys bullying and mistreating girls and began to dream of a world where things could be different.

Nyaradzo Mashayamombe visits schools 
regularly to talk to schoolchildren about
their role in preventing violence. (Photo
Credit: N. Mashayamombe)

Describing herself as a born activist, Mashayamombe foresaw a time when boys would respect girls as much as themselves. Mashayamombe, a member of the YALI Network, also set her sights on bringing girls greater opportunities for education and achievement.


Mashayamombe celebrates the International Day of the Girl on October 11 with the knowledge that she has shared that dream with about 38,000 people across Zimbabwe through the organization she began in 2010, [Tag a Life International \(TaLI\)](#).

With financial support through U.S. Embassy Harare, the U.S. President's Plan for Emergency AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and Hivos, a Netherlands-based international development organization, Mashayamombe has started TaLI clubs in 76 schools. These chapters and their supporters work to reduce gender-based violence and to address the social circumstances that give rise to such violence. Reducing the occurrence of HIV infection among abused girls is another important objective.

The U.S. Embassy projects that its financial support for TaLI will allow the organization to reach 300 more schools with lessons of respect and opportunity over the next two years.

Even while TaLI supporters envision a time in Zimbabwe when children are never tormented and girls never abused, the organization works to provide resources to children who have already been victimized. TaLI provides medical attention, psychosocial counseling and other support services to abused children. The organization also works with law enforcement to help bring cases of abuse to justice.

"We want to see the government of Zimbabwe committing more resources to the issue of child protection," Mashayamombe said in a statement released in recognition of the Day of the Girl. "We also want to see well-resourced justice delivery system and a swift response to cases of abuse."

South African schoolgirls play a ball 
game. Ensuring
that girls get educational opportunities will
improve
their entire future.

Reducing gender-based violence and promoting greater empowerment of girls and women is a cause with broad support across the YALI Network. Another network member wrote us about her work at [Sonke Gender Justice](#). This South Africa-based NGO works across Africa to strengthen government, civil society and citizen capacity to promote gender equality, prevent domestic and sexual violence, and reduce the spread and impact of HIV and AIDS.

Itumeleng Komanyane writes that Sonke Gender Justice envisions a world in which men, women and children can enjoy equitable, healthy and happy relationships that contribute to the development of just and democratic societies.

Creating greater empowerment and opportunity for all is a key value of the Mandela Washington Fellowship program. If you are a community leader involved with these important issues — like Mashayamombe and Komanyane — think about applying to become a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow. The application is open until November 5, 2014, so apply soon. Learn more [here](#).
